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EXHIBITION OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

By Gustav Kobbé

IN one of the galleries in the exhibition of the National Academy of Design is the statue of an Indian standing with extended hand. Into this hand some one placed a penny. It remained there without being stolen for eighteen hours;—which shows that the art lovers of America are as honest as they are, uncritical. Would that the penny had been taken sooner!

This review of the exhibition will leave many pictures unmentioned, but it must not be inferred that silence gives consent. Miss Cecelia Beaux is accounted one of the leading painters of America. Her academy picture hardly confirms this reputation. A young man and woman are walking onto a veranda. Both have their sleeves rolled up, their necks bare. The man especially has the tan of out-of-door life. There is about the subject and its treatment a simplicity that would be less wooden, were it spontaneous, instead of so obviously insisted on and paraded. The picture is called "Portraits in Summer." These pleasant young people should have their portraits painted in winter.

A certain group of pictures ranging from February to September in the seasons suggested by their titles, would seem to indicate from their prevailing color scheme that no

matter in what season Nature is contemplated, she has the blues. But I have pointed out before now that, unlike a woman, Nature is not responsible for the way she is painted. Mr. William Ritschel's "Summer Night on Pacific Coast" is a long vista of sea with waves too metallic in character to convey a feeling of fluidity and oncoming rush. Mr. E. L. Henry's exhibit, "In 1812, News of the War," again shows that this artist's pictures, much as I dislike their infinite detail (which however is not thrust at you) at least have the value of historical accuracy. A marine by Mr. F. J. Waugh, "Coast of Monhegan," is a Winslow Homer with both the Winslow and the Homer left out. Directly under Mr. Waugh's painting, hangs a very small marine. It shows a tossing, storm-darkened sea and a sky of heavy wind-torn clouds; a significant little canvas by Mr. Dedrick Stuber.

"Young Frenchman," a portrait by Miss Catherine Carter Critcher, is almost entirely in tones of black. The young man has a wistful, distant look. The chair on which he is seated is placed sidewise toward the viewer, but the sitter has his right arm thrown over the back and has turned so that he looks out of the picture. The white shirt collar, the brownish moustaches, the somewhat meagre face partly in shadow, the hands—these afford the only relief from the black, unless one allows for the soft gleam of the deep grayish brown velvet of the coat collar and cuffs. The portrait has distinction, even would be notable—had there been no Whistler. Even so, it is a quiet, unobtrusive work that holds one by its expression.

Mr. William Thorne, whose portrait was painted by Sargent, practices an art the very opposite to that of his portraitist. His is a suavity that results in what he aims at, something sweet almost to the point of insipidity. A Thorne has the smooth quality that reproduces stunningly in the newspapers. His contribution to the Academy is called "Fleurette." "The Green and the Gray," by Miss Anna Fisher, is an efficient little still life and deserved to be hung where it could be more closely inspected, instead of high above the line where its merits are likely to be overlooked. Miss Alice Schille's "Promenade at Night," has a somewhat charming, indefinite nocturne effect, its figures, seated and standing, soft, vague and indeterminate, seem melting into the night. Mr. William H. Drake contributes "The Swans." They look like the tin swans that children play with, with magnets in basins and bathtubs. Mr. Drake is an Academician and has the right to the N. A. after his name. The jury of selection should have added a Y and made it NAY.

It already has been pointed out by Mr. Hunecker that Mr. Henry Oliver Walker's "Strayed Reveler," is not revelling. I may add that he doesn't look as if he ever had been. Mr. Kenyon Cox exhibits a large canvas, entitled "A vision of Moonrise." If this be moonlight, let my nights be dark. It has been compared with a Christmas card, and is insipid classicism pushed to its extreme. Mr. James R. Hopkins contributes an "Early Morning," which at least isn't a landscape, but a woman in negligée pouring water into a basin. George Bellow's—"Girl on Couch." One wishes she wasn't. Mr. M. Petersen's

"Riverside Park" looks like a good little impressionistic picture — looks, because hung too high for anyone really to judge of it. In the same way "A Japanese Dress," by Mr. Ivan G. Olinsky looks attractive and interesting. It simply is a girl in Japanese attire standing in front of a screen: She has expression, temperament; but the picture is lost on ninety-nine people out of a hundred, it is hung so high. The Academy always has had a talent for putting the good little things out of the way and honoring the expansive horrors with the line.

A portrait of Miss Helen Appleton, by Mr. Eugene E. Speicher, is a capital study in browns and a thoroughly interesting work. Mr. Waugh has another marine, entitled "The Roaring Main." I failed to hear it. Mr. John W. Alexander shows a picture entitled "The Ring" which is a clever study in iridescence. Of the larger portraits the most successful is Mr. Irving Wiles' "The Sisters," the Misses Kohl, daughters of a western theatrical manager. It is one of Mr. Wiles' most charming canvasses. The sisters are dressed alike in costumes of white drawn-work squares, white tulle falling over shoulders and arms; black hats, from under which they look with dark eyes and soft, smooth olive complexions. One is seated on a pale-yellow sofa. A magazine, its gaudy covers just a little more than suggested, is so loosely held by the lower edges that it rests lightly on her lap. The other girl stands, one hand on the back of the sofa. Her head is partly turned toward the viewer and she reaches up with her other hand to white roses in a blue jar. The background loses itself in deep and indefinite shadows.

A woman who chanced to look across the entire width of the north gallery, suddenly had her attention riveted by a small portrait of a man and immediately exclaimed that it was the one masterpiece in the exhibition. Crossing the room to examine it more closely, she found that it bore the signature of John S. Sargent. It was his portrait of James Whitcomb Riley. She had recognized the master hand from far across the gallery. In this picture there is no hiding behind impressionism or any other ism; no problem of lighting or color scheme solemnly put forward as a subterfuge for mediocrity; no smug theory advanced to distract attention from the fact that the picture is a portrait. And a portrait it is, vital and convincing; a small canvas, but multum in parvo.

As a whole and in spite of the praise bestowed upon a few of the pictures, the exhibition explains why so many of the great American collectors fail to buy American paintings. The artists who cry out against the injustice of this should view some of the fine private galleries, then go to the National Academy of design and look at their own pictures. They would understand.